

Aged Women's Home
1400 West Lexington Street
Baltimore
Baltimore City County
Maryland

HABS No. MD-183

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

THE AGED WOMEN'S HOME

Location: 1400 West Lexington Street, Baltimore, Baltimore City County, Maryland.

Demolished, July 1959.

Brief Statement of Significance: This Gothic Revival structure is an early example of a building expressly erected to house the aged.

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PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATIONA. Physical History

The history of the organization responsible for the Aged Women's Home and the later adjacent Aged Men's Home is pertinent. "Several ladies" formed the Impartial Female Humane Society in 1802 for the purpose of assisting "the deserving widow and deserted wife" and to establish a "Male Free School, upon liberal principles."¹ The Society was incorporated in 1811, and in 1849 the Society was reincorporated as "The Baltimore Humane Impartial Society and Aged Womens Home," for the express purpose of enlarging its sphere of activity to include the aged.² In 1864, the charter was again changed to include a home for Aged Men.³ About this time the school was discontinued. Thus, the Aged Women's Home and Aged Men's Home (the modern name) has had continuous existence as a non-sectarian charity institution for 157 years. This is the oldest charitable organization in Baltimore.

In December, 1848 the Society announced their determination to build an aged women's home on the present site. The lot measured 80 feet front by 150 feet depth. Fifty feet of the frontage was contributed to the Society by James Canby of Wilmington, Delaware. Canby owned 33 acres of land in the vicinity, and was in the process of developing it for residences. The home was one of the first buildings to be erected in his development. In the same announcement, the Society urged merchants and artisans to contribute materials and labor to the building.⁴

Sometime afterwards Thomas Dixon, architect, supplied general drawings. In July of 1849 a number of carpenters submitted bids for construction. L. G. Shipley estimated the total cost as \$15,240, and was willing to do the carpenters work at a deduction of 55% from the standard measurement prices, and also donate \$225 to the Society.

1. Handbill, dated Baltimore, January 23, 1802, in possession of the Society.
2. Statutes of Maryland, 1849, ch. 33.
3. Statutes of Maryland, 1864, ch. 394
4. Baltimore American, December 11, 1848.

Other carpenters made similar offers. The contract was given to David Carson & Son, also the builders of "Waverly Terrace" in the neighborhood. Carson would give a discount of 50% on the standard prices, and an additional 12-1/2% as a contribution, making 62-1/2% in all. He also recommended retention of the architect to superintend construction which "would save the builder some time."

When nearly completed the building was carefully described in an article in the Baltimore Sun, June 4, 1850:

The Widows Home -- This is the name of a really beautiful specimen of architecture, now rapidly approaching completion, and situated on West Lexington Street. It has a fine front of sixty-two feet, running back to a depth of seventy-five feet, and is three stories in height, besides a spacious basement. The style of the building is Tudor gothic. The front is adorned with elaborate stone work, and the entrance is through a buttress seven feet deep and twenty four wide, and having five inches all of finely dressed stone, reached by a flight of granite steps. Above is a large bay window, of elegant design, also of stone . . . The top decorations are of finely carved stone, embellished with embattled parapets . . . The entrance conducts on the left to the reception room . . . This apartment also contains fourteen single chambers, each containing a window, and with opening into a spacious hall . . . The second story likewise contains fourteen single chambers, as does the story above, all of which are nine feet wide and fifteen deep. The board room is an apartment in the second story, commanding the front, which will be finished in the most elegant manner; adjoining which is the apartment for the matron . . . Each story is supplied with bath rooms, water closets, and every convenience which a well constructed residence affords; and in the third is an apartment designed for an infirmary . . . The hall, which occupies the entire centre of the building, and into which open every chamber in the house, is rendered exceedingly cheerful and pleasant by the copious flood of light from a spacious cupola, the sash of which are so arranged so as to afford ventilation . . . The piazzas encircling each story of the hall are supported by successive ranges of gothic pillars -- those in the first story composed of brick, and those above of wood. The basement contains a kitchen, dining room, sewing apartment, pantries and cellar, and beneath the entrance is a fine arrangement for a refrigerator on a large scale. The building has been designed by and constructed under the immediate superintendence of Messrs. Dixon & Wright, architects . . .

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5. Letters from carpenters in possession of the Society. For Waverly Terrace see Howland & Spencer The Architecture of Baltimore (The Johns Hopkins Press, 1953).

Below are excerpts from the "Statement of Orders for Monies issued by the Architect, on account of the Building of the "Aged Womens Home", a document in possession of the Society:

C. & J. Emery (stone masons)	\$ 359.84
Charles L. Emery (stone masons)	544.00
Emery & Keys (stone masons)	228.00
D. M. Adams (brickmaker)	2,500.00
David Carson & Son. (carpenters)	2,549.00
Edward Miller (bricklayer)	927.48
J. Vaughan & Co. (lumber merchant)	1,887.00
Evans & Foster (plumber)	435.00
John Lyeth (marble & mantle cutter)	1,657.58
Thomas Dixon (architect)	581.00
Hayward, Bartlett & Co. (stove manufacturers)	317.43
John G. Hetzell (tin & sheet metal)	444.28
Samuel Bilson (plasterer)	1,005.20
Isaac Mules (painter)	902.60
Joseph Thomas & Son (steam turners)	453.50
Hugh Sisson (building stone cutter)	90.00

Total cost, including insurance, labor, and miscellaneous was \$17,156.72.

The front part of the present building was very little changed from the description and data given above. But in 1874 the entire fabric was lengthened by forty feet, including the interior hall, and a second grand staircase added at the north end of the hall. The additional length to the balconies and the added rooms were carefully matched to the original, but the exterior detail was simplified. Thomas Dixon was probably the architect for this extension. Early in the twentieth century further additions were made beyond this building, and recently a wing was built to connect with the adjacent Aged Men's Home. None of these later additions are notable.

B. Old Views

No original drawings seem to have survived. The only important old view is a small engraved vignette on Thomas Poppleton's Map of Baltimore, 1852 edition, which clearly defines the original extent of the Aged Women's Home. Only about two inches square, it nevertheless shows the number of windows, the original placement of the chimney, and the nature of the original clerestory.

Prepared by Wilbur Harvey Hunter, Jr.
and F. Garner Ranney, The Peale Museum,
Baltimore, Maryland - November 1959

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

The Aged Women's Home (cornerstone laid 1849; completed

1850) and the adjoining Aged Men's Home (cornerstone laid 1863; completed 1865) were both demolished in July, 1959. Their significance lies in their special purposes, and the admirable way in which their functions were met. Thomas Dixon was architect for both, and is also notable for the design of the Baltimore City Jail (1855-59); with James Dixon), the Mount Vernon Place Church (1870 ff; with Charles L. Carson), and other important buildings.

The Aged Women's Home, in particular, is strongly built, elegantly proportioned and detailed in the Tudor Gothic style, and exceptionally light and airy inside. The three story hall with balconies, lighted from above by a clerestory, was unusually interesting. The single rooms, each nine by fifteen feet and lighted by a large window, were spacious and cheerful.

B. Detailed Description:

Along the Lexington Street frontage of the Aged Women's Home is a brick retaining wall surmounted by a heavy stone trim and an iron railing of Gothic design which is probably contemporary with the building. In the center of this wall six granite steps lead through a double gate to a terrace approximately six feet wide, beyond which a further and much broader flight of twelve granite steps ascends the width of the front porch and gives access to the main entrance.

This brick porch, together with the two-story bay window above it, is the chief architectural feature of the exterior. It is 28 feet 10 inches in width and 8 feet deep, and projects from the central block of the facade, which is itself set slightly forward of the rest of the building. Five Gothic arches, three in front and one on either side, with stone trim and stone label molds, are separated by four brick buttresses, likewise stone trimmed and terminated by stone pinnacles with crockets. The stone crenelation of the porch parapet echoes, on a smaller scale, the crenelation which runs the length of the facade at the roof line. The inside of the porch is cross-vaulted in wood. The floor consists of cement blocks of two shades of grey in a checker-board pattern and is possibly of a later date. Iron railings close the side arches and two more descend from the central frontal arch to the terrace below in line with the outer gate.

Rising from the porch is the three-sided bay window on the second and third stories, its stone trim ornamented with a band of quatrefoils between the stories and alternate trefoils in the cresting. It is believed that the outward corners of the bay originally terminated in smaller versions of the pinnacles with crockets which decorate the porch: two such pinnacles in bas relief still appear where the wide walls join the main facade, and this further decoration is shown in the picture of the building on Poppleton's Map of Baltimore of 1851.

This facade, like all the exterior walls, is of brick, laid in English bond up to the water table and common bond above. The water table is of stone in front and brick at the sides, a change of material also observable in the string courses above the first and second stories. Along the front only is a stone cornice, higher on the central block than on its flanking walls, above which is a brick crenelation with a stone trim. This crenelation is interrupted over the bay window by a much broader and more elevated merlon bearing the words "Aged Women's Home," and is dropped at either end to a much lower terminal merlon, thus accentuating the steplike rise of the roof line and the central decorative elements of the porch and bay.

Both floors of the bay have three windows at the front and one on either side, all of equal size. Each side of the bay is flanked by a window on the projecting part of the facade and two more on the recessive wall, an arrangement which is repeated on the entrance floor. The windows are divided by a slender central column, forming two gothic lancet arches within a larger shallow arch, all of wood. Those on the first floor have four panes of glass; those on the second, eight; and those on the third, six. They are surrounded by a molded brick trim (a cross-section of which would be roughly S-shaped) and have stone sills.

The windows on the first and second stories, together with the two windows flanking the bay on the third story, have ornamental hoods which are of cast iron simulating stone, a motif which is repeated on the side walls. The windows of the elevated basement, however, while retaining a tudor gothic appearance, are simpler and are divided crosswise into four equal sections of six panes each, protected by iron bars and furnished with inside folding shutters.

The side walls are topped with a molded cornice and gutter, either of wood or cast iron. Two chimneys are observable, one near the front and the other towards the rear on the east side.

A corner stone at the south-east corner of the building bears the date 1849 and a second, above the water table on the east wall, states: "Aged Women's Home Enlarged A. D. 1874." For this addition the side walls were carried back forty feet. The style of the addition was in keeping with the rest of the building, but is a greatly simplified gothic, with plainer windows and no molded brick. At the back further and still later additions and alterations are seen. The foundations of the original structure are apparently brick.

The main entrance has an arched transom and a door of two leaves, each containing a long glass panel. On either side, facing onto the porch, is a window with iron bars.

The entrance hall is 15 feet 5 inches wide and extends 24 feet 4 inches along the front of the building. Its flooring, of pine, is in the original random widths. To the right of the front door rises the principal staircase, of plain design, with a walnut rail and newel posts. There is a small room under the stairs. To the left of the entrance hall is a corridor leading to two rooms, the larger of which, on the south-west corner, has three windows and a fireplace and is now used as the office.

Beyond this entrance hall is the great central court which is the essential element of the whole design. The court was originally shorter than at present, having been lengthened with the additions of 1874, and its roof and light well differ from older representations such as that on Poppleton's map of 1851, but the general effect must be similar to that of the first building. From wall to wall it is 80 feet 6 inches long by 27 feet 5 inches wide. It rises the full three stories of the building and above that a coved ceiling supports the light well, almost as large as the court, which has clerestory windows the length of the east and west sides and is braced laterally by four beams at the south end. Galleries on the second and third floors surround the court, providing a walkway 5 feet 10 inches wide on each long side, still wider at the ends, and angled across the corners so as to form an elongated octagon. The measurement from each corner of the court to the gallery railing angled across it is 11 feet 4 inches.

The galleries are supported by brick columns and arches on the first floor -- nine arches to each side and three at each end -- and by narrower wooden posts with bracketed wooden arches, also shallow, on the second floor. Each arch is 5 feet 5 inches wide. The third floor is without columns and arches, but is furnished with a railing similar to that between the arches on the second floor, and larger posts at intervals in the railing correspond to the octagonal columns below. The diminishing scale of the columns, together with the openness of the third floor gallery and the height of the light well, gives an effect of brightness, dignity and spaciousness to the whole interior.

Originally there were seven rooms that opened off this court on each side on every floor. The later lengthening provided for eight rooms on each side, plus those added beyond the court. Each room is about nine feet wide by 15 feet 5 inches deep. The interior partitions are of lath and plaster except in the case of the original corner rooms, which have each a brick wall ten inches thick corresponding to the original end walls of the court, and which also were once distinguished by fireplaces, a feature not found in the other rooms. The wooden doors of the rooms are arranged in pairs the length of the court, although two of these are slightly more separated than the others. Each door has six panels, three above and three below. The

doorways on the first floor have shallow gothic arches fitted with narrow wooden transoms in the same shape; those on the upper floors have square heads and oblong wooden transoms.

At the back of the court a wide hall leads to the additions of a later date, a broad and massive Victorian staircase rising on the left. A small elevator has been installed beside the staircase.

In front, on the second floor, is the Board Room, its bay windows and two flanking windows looking out on the roof of the porch. This room is 25 feet long and 14 feet 10 inches broad at its narrowest points. The windows are all deep casements with heavy inside shutters which are panelled in a simple gothic design on the side that opens outward to the street. Facing the bay, which is 8 feet 3 inches wide by 3 feet 8 inches deep, is a fireplace and chimney 5 feet 8 inches wide, projecting nine inches from the wall and with a marble mantelpiece. On either side is a door, angled across the corner of the room, giving entrance from the gallery. At the west end are a double and a single door, leading now to a closet and a cupboard, but possibly originally one of these communicated with the adjoining room, which was that of the matron. The Board Room has a plaster cornice and a plaster compartmented ceiling of tudor gothic design with a central rosette.

Other, smaller, rooms occupy the rest of the second floor front and stretch across that of the third. One of these was originally the infirmary.

The elevated basement is divided by brick partitions, with a long room on the east side which was probably the original dining room, and an interior corridor and other compartments, which were designed as kitchen, sewing room, pantries and cellar. Some of these rooms have fire places and the remains of chair rails. The door trim is wood; the floors are cement, apparently of a later date.

A door on the east side and two doors on the west provide entrances at ground level. In front, under the porch, is a barrel-vaulted refrigerator room of brick and stone, with a rubble and dirt floor, six and a half feet wide and running the length of the porch. A narrow gothic lancet window at each end supplies illumination.

The original heating arrangements remain something of a mystery. Fireplaces appear to have been few and far between, unless all trace of some of them was obliterated in later renovations. One clue is found in the pamphlet, now in the Enoch Pratt Free Library, entitled, The Baltimore Humane Impartial Society and Aged Women's Home, Acts of Incorporation and Bylaws, Baltimore, printed by James Young, 1851. Article 1 of the section headed "Rules and Regulations for the

Government of the 'Home' " deals with the duties of the Superintendent and states: "She will be expected to go through the house, and see the fires and lights extinguished at nine o'clock, with the exception of one lamp, which is to be left burning all night. A constant fire to be kept in the stove in the Hall, from the 15th of November to the 1st of April." A stove in the central court appears, therefore, to have been the principal source of heat.

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